

food for thou

In the wee, quiet hours of Friday morning, Thelma Dalman and her staff of volunteers will begin to transform the old County Hospital kitchen into a bustling Santa's workshop. The culinary accomplishments of this auspicious crew will defy even the mythical achievements of old Saint Nicholas himself. For starters, 2500 pounds of turkey will be roasted, 500 pounds of potatoes peeled and cooked, 400 pounds of salad and 450 pounds of vegetables prepared.

The two-day cooking marathon is scheduled in preparation for the Grey Bears Annual Christmas Dinner, to be held on Sunday from 1-4 pm at the Civic Auditorium. The monumental community event is celebrating its ninth year and has become something of a tradition in Santa Cruz. The dinner culminates the work of 20 committees and some 1200 volunteers — donating countless hours of time, cash and food for a holiday feast for local senior citizens.

While Thelma and cooking crew are sauteing hundreds of onions and stirring giant vats of thick, creamy gravy, another committee will decorate the Civic Auditorium with dozens of Christmas trees ornamented by school children and donated from classrooms all over the County. Tables will be set with 3000 individually drawn placemats (also a donation from the school children) and festooned with truckloads of greenery and flowers donated by Santa Cruz Lumber and local florists.

Most of the food and drink for the dinner is donated by merchants, local groceries, wineries and liquor stores. But the delicious



PHOTO: PAUL SCHRAUB

home-baked desserts are the contributions of hundreds of individuals around the county who will begin bringing in their delectable creations from 9 am-2 pm on Saturday and Sunday. With many local families, baking for the event has become a tradition. The McCrays of Davenport, for example, plan to bring 100 apple pies, all home-baked in their family kitchen.



Grin and Bear It

Marti Edwards

Early Sunday morning the National Guard will bring the steaming food from Thelma's kitchen over to the Civic Auditorium and into the mobile kitchen units set up by the Forestry Service. Five hundred hot dinners will be delivered before noon by community volunteers to senior citizens who, for one reason or another, are immobile and cannot come to the Civic.

For those dinner guests who can come — and some 3500 of them are expected — the Santa Cruz Fire Fighters Association and a host of individuals will be providing free transportation — individuals and groups with wheelchair vehicles (such as the Care-A-Van people) are also donating their services. And all downtown buses will be stopping at the door of the Civic all day Sunday. Since parking is limited, individuals who can be encouraged to take the bus. Anyone disabled and in need of special transportation or home delivery should call the Senior Information and Referral Agency at 462-1433 (or from Watsonville, 728-1751).

While one must be at least 60 years old to reap the benefits of this delightful community project, the event spans every age group and involves a broad cross-section of the community. For example, the dozens of "seaters" and "greeters" on Sunday will be members of high school honor societies or local scout troops. Continuous entertainment of fine music and dance will be provided throughout the day by various local notables donating their talents to the occasion. Of course Santa Claus will be there, along with Ms. Claus (in the person of Santa Cruz' beloved Ginger Johnson — the "rainbow lady" at the Cooper House).

"The annual Christmas dinner is only a small sideline of the Grey Bears' programs," comments Executive Director Marcia Margolin, who runs the volunteer organization year-round. The dinner is, however, a

fitting symbol of the masterful work of this well-organized, dedicated group of citizens. Organized in 1973 by UCSC students Kristina Maillard and Garry Denny when they began giving away extra produce from their garden, the California Grey Bears has grown from 376 members its first year to its current roster of 4066. Their waiting list is approaching 500, even though they are adding 15 new members a week.

According to Margolin, the goal of the Grey Bears is two-fold: to offer weekly nutritional supplement for Santa Cruz County senior citizens, and to provide an opportunity for meaningful activity for retired persons. As a volunteer program, its success cannot be equalled. The "Brown Bag" program, which distributes surplus food approximately 10 months out of the year, delivers 3900 bags of free groceries per week — a total of 2.5 million pounds of food per year. (Its 450 shut-in members receive the groceries year-round.) Senior citizens volunteer to solicit donations of food from growers, packers, retailers and individuals. While the food donated to the Grey Bears is "non-marketable," usually it has been designated as such for cosmetic reasons only.

Seniors go out to collect the surplus products, harvesting the remainder of a field before it is plowed, picking up day-old products from bakeries, fresh meat from restaurants which are required to trim their steaks to a specified size and weight, and dented cans or surplus produce from retail groceries. Food is bagged every Thursday morning at the Grey Bear facility at 1298 Fair Avenue and is taken to distribution sites all over the County. Any senior citizen is eligible for the Brown Bag program; membership in the organization is a mere \$5 per year.

Seniors who cannot work in the fields or collect goods can volunteer in a host of other ways. In addition to the gleaners, there are

jobs for telephone receptionists, envelope stuffers, solicitors of gifts, baggers, packers and distributors — over 600 volunteers contributing more than 17,000 hours of work per month. Shut-ins are some of the busiest participants of the Grey Bears program. Because they are at home most of the time, they are given rosters of names and numbers. When a call comes in from a farmer who must disc his field the next day, the callers get on the phones and round up a group of volunteers to pick that very afternoon (organization that would soon put General Motors out of business).

Although the Grey Bears receive some money from County and state revenues, they raise half of their support themselves from foundations, individuals, and Grey Bears' projects such as their newspaper and aluminum can recycling efforts, rummage sales and booths at local fairs. And while not all cities within Santa Cruz County participate in funding the organization, all parts of the County are served by them.

The Grey Bears' newest auspicious project is the building of a Work Center, which they hope to have erected sometime in 1983. Cabrillo College's architectural drawing classes has donated a set of plans for a center that would include a warehouse, a storage shed, a passive solar system for growing herbs, a co-generational facility for turning spoiled goods into methane gas and denatured alcohol, a thrift store, a kitchen for canning (which would offer cooking classes for seniors), a woodworking shop open to all seniors, and a sewing room. Sound like an ambitious project? It is. But if the Grey Bears attack this undertaking with the same practical enthusiasm which permeates their other programs, the Work Center undoubtedly will materialize.



PHOTO: PAUL SCHRAUB

So if you're over 60, head on down to the Civic Auditorium Sunday afternoon and enjoy the festivities. If, in the spirit of the season, you'd like to volunteer for any aspect of the holiday dinner, give the Grey Bears a call at 427-3000. And, if you have extra brown bags piling up around the house, you know who could use them. □